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UNCLAS SARAJEVO 000184

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H PASS HOUSE DEMOCRACY PARTNERSHIP (LIS)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [OVID](#) [BK](#)
SUBJECT: CODEL POMEROY MEETINGS IN BOSNIA, FEBRUARY 14-16

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Representative Earl Pomeroy (D-ND), in Bosnia February 14-16, met with parliamentarians, civil society representatives, students, Prime Minister Nikola Spiric, and the Bosnian tri-presidency. Pomeroy outlined the functions of the House Democracy Partnership (HDP), urging Bosnian leaders to undertake reforms necessary for the development of their country. He highlighted the need for Bosnian leaders to act now on critical issues without awaiting the outcome of October 2010 general elections. Priorities should include: EU visa liberalization, compliance with the recent ECHR ruling in the Sejdic/Finci case, excess weapons destruction, sending a contingent to participate with NATO in Afghanistan, and joining the United States and EU in confronting Iranian non-compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in the UNSC. End Summary.

Meeting with State Parliament Speakers

¶2. (SBU) In his meetings with the speakers of Bosnia's state-level parliament, Rep. Pomeroy commended them for past efforts on defense reform and to fulfill many visa liberalization requirements, but noted the need for continued effort on constitutional reform to improve the functionality of the state. He stressed that any reform of the constitution would have to balance honoring individual rights while allowing the governing majority to carry out initiatives. Pomeroy said that minority rights cannot mean minority veto, but rather respect for the concerns of the minority. After acknowledging the difficult work ahead for Bosnian political leaders, Pomeroy described the House Democracy Partnership's work, noting that it is aimed at building relationships and information exchanges with parliaments. He said that to date the Commission has 14 partnerships world-wide, including two in the region (Macedonia and Kosovo). Pomeroy explained how the HDP assists parliaments with building the capacity of parliamentary staff, strengthening parliamentary oversight functions, and improving constituent services, but that BiH was not yet ready for this partnership.

¶3. (SBU) House of Representatives (HoR) Speaker Milorad Zivkovic nmf~|!|(for Human Rights by May, but that it was tough to undertake broader reform before the October general elections. Deputy HoR Speaker Beriz Belkic from the largely Bosniak Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH) spoke of politicians being hostages to nationalist politics and welcomed continued U.S. engagement in reform talks, while Deputy Speaker Niko Lozancic from the Croat Democratic Union (HDZ-BiH) spoke of the Bosnian political leaders' need for encouragement. House of Peoples Speaker Ilijas Filipovic, also HDZ-BiH, focused on

the plight of Bosnian Croats, saying that they do not "feel comfortable" in one entity, or share an equal constitutional position. Filipovic maintained that as long as entity voting was possible, Bosnian political leaders would not be able to achieve greater progress on needed reforms. He pointed out that the use of entity voting had blocked the passage of more than 100 laws to date.

Meeting with PM Spiric

¶4. (SBU) Rep. Pomeroy told Spiric that he had hoped to see more progress on constitutional reform, but noted Bosnia's achievements to date on EU visa liberalization. Pomeroy said the United States looks forward to helping Bosnia move along the path to EU and NATO membership, and suggested that one immediate concrete step BiH could make would be to destroy dangerous excess weapons and ammunition. Pomeroy reminded Spiric that the U.S. Congress could provide funding to assist with verifiable destruction processes, and that Bosnia's progress on this front would move the country closer to getting a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP).

¶5. (SBU) Spiric thanked Pomeroy for his visit and for all the pivotal assistance that the USG has provided to Bosnia in the past. Spiric listed the four focal points he said he had chosen to concentrate on as Prime Minister: 1) meeting requirements for EU visa liberalization; 2) achieving MAP status; 3) implementing the European Court of Human Rights decision on discriminatory provisions in the BiH Constitution; and 4) mitigating the effects of the global economic crisis. Spiric asserted that achieving visa-free travel and MAP status would be of great benefit to Bosnian citizens and give BiH a surge of optimism required for them to make other needed reforms, including a restoration of trust, which Spiric termed the "mother of all reforms." Spiric continued that any prolonged stall on the road to Euro-Atlantic integration would only strengthen non-democratic forces in Bosnia. In terms of making progress on constitutional reform, Spiric lamented that many in BiH continue to look to the past and question the provisions of the Dayton Peace Accords, rather than work toward a better future. Spiric said that the Council of Ministers had recently tasked the Ministers of Justice and Human Rights and Refugees with creating an action plan to implement the ECHR decision. He stated his belief that this could be done as long as other political factors do not try to widen the discussion to include more "radical" constitutional changes.

Meeting with Presidency

¶6. (SBU) In his meeting with Bosnia's Tri-Presidency members (ethnic Croat Zeljko Komsic, Bosniak Haris Silajdzic, and Serb Nebojsa Radmanovic), Rep. Pomeroy outlined the activities of the House Democracy Partnership, but stressed that Bosnia would need to undertake significant reforms before the HDP would be in a position to begin such a relationship here. Specifically, Rep. Pomeroy noted progress made thus far on visa liberalization, and suggested that Bosnia could do much prior to the October 2010 elections, such as agreeing on excess weapons disposal, sending a planned contingent to Afghanistan, and reaching agreement, along with EU members of the UN Security Council and the United States, on a means of dealing with Iranian nuclear issues.

¶7. (SBU) All Presidency members said they had reached agreement on sending a contingent to Afghanistan, but were working through the modalities. Rep. Pomeroy commended this joint decision, but warned that logistical details ought not be an excuse for inaction. On weapons disposal, Komsic expressed willingness to move forward with destruction of "anything dangerous" immediately, a sentiment that Silajdzic echoed, saying he supported destruction as the best of three options being debated (to sell, donate, or destroy), and hoped for eventual resolution. Silajdzic supported calls for immediate reform, saying he believed constitutional changes,

even beyond those necessary to comply with the recent ECHR ruling, were possible prior to elections. Radmanovic dissented from this, saying he believed there was considerable disagreement on constitutional reform, and instead called for immediate closure of OHR, which he characterized as "an obstacle on our path to the EU." All Presidency members expressed thanks for Rep. Pomeroy's personal, and long-standing, interest in Bosnia's well-being, and noted positively the USG role over the years in helping build stability in Bosnia.

Meeting with HighRep Inzko

¶ 8. (SBU) Rep. Pomeroy discussed the current political situation in BiH and the role of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) with High Representative Inzko. Inzko explained that, although little progress could be noted over the last 15 years. Responding to Pomeroy's question about international support for (and the future of) OHR, Inzko mentioned possible EU plans to reduce their contributions to OHR by 25 percent. As to the future, Inzko said he felt that even after BiH politicians meet the "five-plus-two" conditions for OHR closure, there will always be a need to have a mechanism to help interpret the Dayton Peace Accords. When asked about his three top priorities, Inzko said constitutional reform, education issues such as stopping school segregation, and improving the economy and business climate (including BiH making better use of its natural renewable energy resources).

Lunch with Civil Society Reps

¶ 9. (SBU) Pomeroy met with journalists, academics, and NGO representatives as well, outlining House Democracy Partnership programs in Macedonia and Kosovo, and stressing the value of peer-to-peer consultations with foreign parliamentarians. Queried by Pomeroy about their views on the current political impasse, civil society interlocutors bemoaned the deteriorating situation in Bosnia, characterizing local politicians as "entrenched" in the status quo. Commenting on the schools, media, and government, they claimed that "there is a comprehensive program to ethnically divide" the country and to "prove that we cannot live together."

¶ 10. (SBU) Interlocutors said that Bosnian media is not able to independently report on events in the country, with each outlet tending to represent only one ethnic or political perspective. They also highlighted the problem of schools that are increasingly focused on a single nationality or religion, noting that the currently-graduating high-school students are the first generation to have never lived in an ethnically-diverse society. Participants said they believe that NATO accession is more important to BiH than EU, because security is the highest priority and NATO is the only institution that can provide any guarantees. When asked who they needed to be secure from, they responded "ourselves." Interlocutors also complained about the lethargy within civil society organizations, saying that "civil society is quiet" and does not effectively partner with the government. NGOs are focused on their own survival, or on simply criticizing the government rather than trying to work within the system to improve the situation, they said.

¶ 11. (SBU) Participants commented that Bosnian politicians have been "negotiating things that are non-negotiable," such as human rights, without addressing more contentious issues, and for which a negotiated solution could exist. When asked by Rep. Pomeroy why they vote for these politicians, the participants responded that there are no alternatives, and that there has yet to be a truly "free and democratic elections" as all elections occur in an "atmosphere of fear."

Breakfast with Students

¶12. (SBU) On February 15, Rep. Pomeroy had a private breakfast with university students from American University Bosnia-Herzegovina and the University of Sarajevo in which students discussed their personal and professional aspirations. He then explained the structure and functioning of the U.S. Congress, and shared with them some experiences from his 18-year tenure.

Comment

¶13. (SBU) CODEL Pomeroy provided helpful and timely reinforcement on a number of key issues where Bosnia can and should take steps now to move forward on a path of Euro-Atlantic integration: constitutional reform, excess weapons destruction, UNSC voting on Iran, and participation in ISAF. Rep. Pomeroy's clear expression of legislative-executive unity in pushing for these steps, in pursuit of Bosnia's own stability, played an important part of our ongoing bipartisan and USG-wide effort to encourage Bosnian leaders to take responsibility for their country's well-being. End Comment.

¶14. (U) CODEL Pomeroy cleared on this cable.

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